(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken to help the vegetable oil industry in the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (DR. AKHILESH PRASAD SINGH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) Steps taken by the Government to improve the health of vegetable oil industry include:

(i) Import duty on certain vegetable oils of edible grade intended for manufacture of refined oil/vanaspati is levied at a concessional rate.

(ii) Import duty on certain crude vegetable oils of edible grade has been kept low as compared to refined oils to facilitate raw material availability.

(iii) In order to encourage production of solvent extracted oils in the country and to promote export of extractions, excise duty on food grade hexane has been reduced from 32% to 16%.

(iv) Excise duty on refined edible oils/vanaspati/interesterified fat, etc. has been withdrawn.

(v) Import duty on vanaspati, bakery shortening, interesterified fat, margarine has been raised from 30% to 80%.

(vi) In order to harmonize the interests of farmers, processors and consumers the import duty structure on edible oils is reviewed from time to time.

(vii) Tariff Value is fixed from time to time for palm oil & its products and soyabean oil.

Prices of essential commodities

2933. SHRI DARA SINGH: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether the prices of essential commodities have been increasing for the last one year or so;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the reasons for drastic differences being found in the consumer selling price of foodgrains, sugar, oil and vegetables during the current year as compared to the last year; and

(d) the effective measures being taken or proposed to be taken by Government to check this rising trend of prices?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI TASLIMUDDIN): (a) to (c) During the last one year, prices of essential commodities such as wheat, atta, pulses and sugar registered an increase. Prices of onion have generally declined or remained steady in most parts of the country as compared to the prices prevailing a year ago. The reasons for higher prices of wheat in the current year are lower arrivals in the market, lower procurement and relatively lower stocks in the Central Pool. Prices of pulses have increased mainly due to limited carry forward of stock from previous year. Besides, increase in domestic production of pulses was only limited. High international prices of sugar, export obligations on sugar factories/importers under Advance Licence Scheme and shortage in neighbouring countries have, *inter-alia*, affected sentiments leading to higher prices of sugar in the country.

(d) Government has given high priority in containing the prices of essential commodities within reasonable levels. Prices of essential commodities are being closely monitored regularly. Besides, other steps being taken to check the rise in prices are higher releases of commodities like sugar and wheat, conversion of unsold/undespatched quantity of free sale sugar into levy sugar and import of wheat.

Supply of broken rice by FCI in Punjab

2934. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that broken rice purchased by the suppliers at the rate of Rs.2.50 per kg. is mixed with good quality of rice and supplied to the Food Corporation of India in Punjab;

(b) whether it is a fact that the suppliers make the payment to F.C.I. officials at the rate of Rs.4500 per truck and supply huge quantity to F.C.I.; and